

Nothing to Do: Children's Picture Book

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Thesis Advisor

Dr. Darolyn Erica Jones

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dr. Darolyn Erica Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Abstract

Although I have studied picture books from a literary standpoint during my time at Ball State University, picture books have never been an area of study in my writing courses. For my creative thesis project, I chose to educate myself on the specific skills and techniques utilized in picture books, and to write and illustrate such a book of my own. I studied the current market and reception of children's books and enrolled in ENG 204, Children's Literature, to prepare myself for the project.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Darolyn Jones for advising me through this project, and for allowing me a place in her Children's Literature class this semester. The final product would not have been possible without the insight, advice, and encouragement she provided throughout the semester.

I would like to thank Ryn Bailey, fellow creative writing student and close friend, for instructing me through the use of Adobe InDesign. Without her technological wizardry, this book would never have come to fruition.

I would like to thank Ball State Printing Services for their patience and assistance in printing this project.

I would like to thank Colton for encouraging me throughout the semester and for providing a never-ending source of inspiration.

I would like to thank my mother for providing me with a lifelong love of books and for pointing me in the right direction in regards to my research.

Author's Statement

Picture books have always captivated me, even after I developed the skills as a reader to progress onto novels. It is not easy to tell a story as compelling and engaging as the greatest novel; it is still harder to tell a story with far fewer words and with illustrations added into the creative process. Through my years at Ball State as a creative writing student, I have honed technical skills such as clear, concise language and developing tight and quick plots for short stories. Believing that these abilities would be of use in the construction of an effective picture book, I chose to illustrate, write, and print a book for my creative thesis project.

To educate myself further on picture books and their audience, I enrolled in ENG 204, Children's Literature, taught by my thesis advisor, Dr. Darolyn Jones. In class discussion as well as the assigned readings, we discussed the elements of a well-written children's book, such as precise and appropriate vocabulary for the intended audience, believable dialogue, and figurative and flowing language (Tunnell et al., 17-26). We also discussed the defining traits of a well-illustrated picture book, including the use of illustrations to reinforce the text, show a situation from multiple points of view, establish setting and mood, and further develop a story's plot (Tunnell et al., 29-33). Throughout the semester, I completed projects such as analyses of the genres of children's literature or the traits of specific authors, furthering my understanding of the components that went into a picture book. I also wrote and presented a book talk during the class, identifying and articulating what made a picture book appealing to me and worth recommending to others.

To better understand the current world of children's literature, I also researched the market for picture books. I purchased a copy of the *2012 Children's Writer's & Illustrator's Market* and began reading the children's book sections of the literary journals *Publishers Weekly* and *Kirkus Review*. I found that while children's books sales have remained relatively stable during the recession (*Publishers Weekly*, 2012), the market for digital picture books are on the rise (Sambuchino, 85). I had been considering making a book with pop-ups or textured illustrations, but after my market research I chose instead to make a book which could be scanned and read in a digital format without losing the essence of the pictures. I also discovered that paperback books are currently selling better than hardback (Sambuchino, 89) and that fantasy stories are growing more popular (Tunnell et al., 53), both of which influenced the decisions I made regarding the paperback format and plot content of my own picture book.

I examined *Publishers Weekly's* article, "Best Children's Books of 2011," to see what, if anything, the selected books had in common and what I could emulate from those works. Among the selected was Jon Klassen's debut book *I Want My Hat Back*, which I was already familiar with due to the book's popularity on the social media website Tumblr (*Publishers Weekly*, 2011). Upon seeing the recognition that one of my favorite recent picture books had received, I decide to style my picture book in the same manner as *I Want My Hat Back*, using simple, repetitive imagery and making my story a "pattern" picture book, i.e., a book that repeats scenarios and phrases throughout the story (Tunnell et al., 67). In *I Want My Hat Back*, a bear asks animal after animal if they have seen his missing hat, and replies "Okay. Thank you anyway," when met with the inevitable "no." In my own picture book, *Nothing to Do*, a girl and her cat wander from room to room of her house in search of an adventure. Each room is dismissed as lacking, and each scene ends with a "meow" from the cat.

I chose to write my book in rhyme partly as homage to my favorite children's author, Theodore Seuss Geisel, and partly because poetry was never a focus of my creative writing studies and I wanted to further challenge myself on the project. My decision to write a young girl as the story's protagonist was cemented after I looked through my collection of Dr. Seuss's books and realized that only one of them, *Daisy Head Maisy*, featured a female lead. I created the illustrations via collage, using paper, felt, and yarn, because I felt that it would be easier to maintain consistency from page to page if I were cutting paper rather than attempting to draw the same faces and bodies multiple times. I also felt that the texture of the paper and the yarn, visible on the scanned and printed pages of the book, made the simplistic illustrations more engaging to look at. Apart from the book's final page, the story only utilizes three colors: black, white, and red. I chose this restricted palette to underscore the boredom experienced by the protagonist in her search to find something to do.

I printed and stapled the book together on my own partially due to time constraints and partially because I had planned at first to bind the original pages together by hand and submit the handmade book for my thesis. However, I eventually chose to scan the pages and submit a printed copy to the Honors College, as I wanted to keep the original book for myself.

Works Cited

Sambuchino, Chuck. *2012 Children's Writer's and Illustrator's Market*. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 2011. Print.

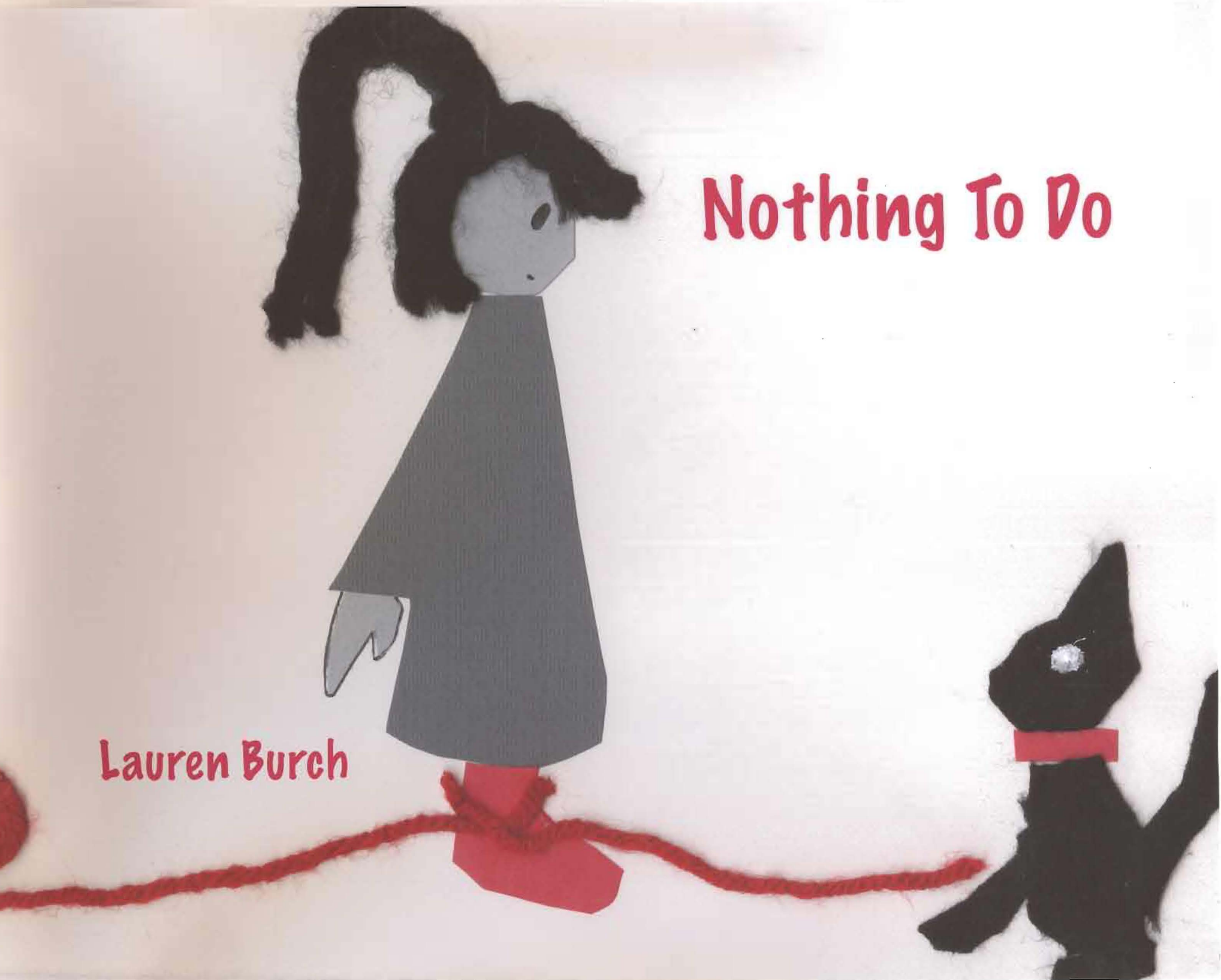
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Acknowledgements

To Darolyn Jones, whose great advice and encouragement was exactly what I needed to stay on track throughout the semester.

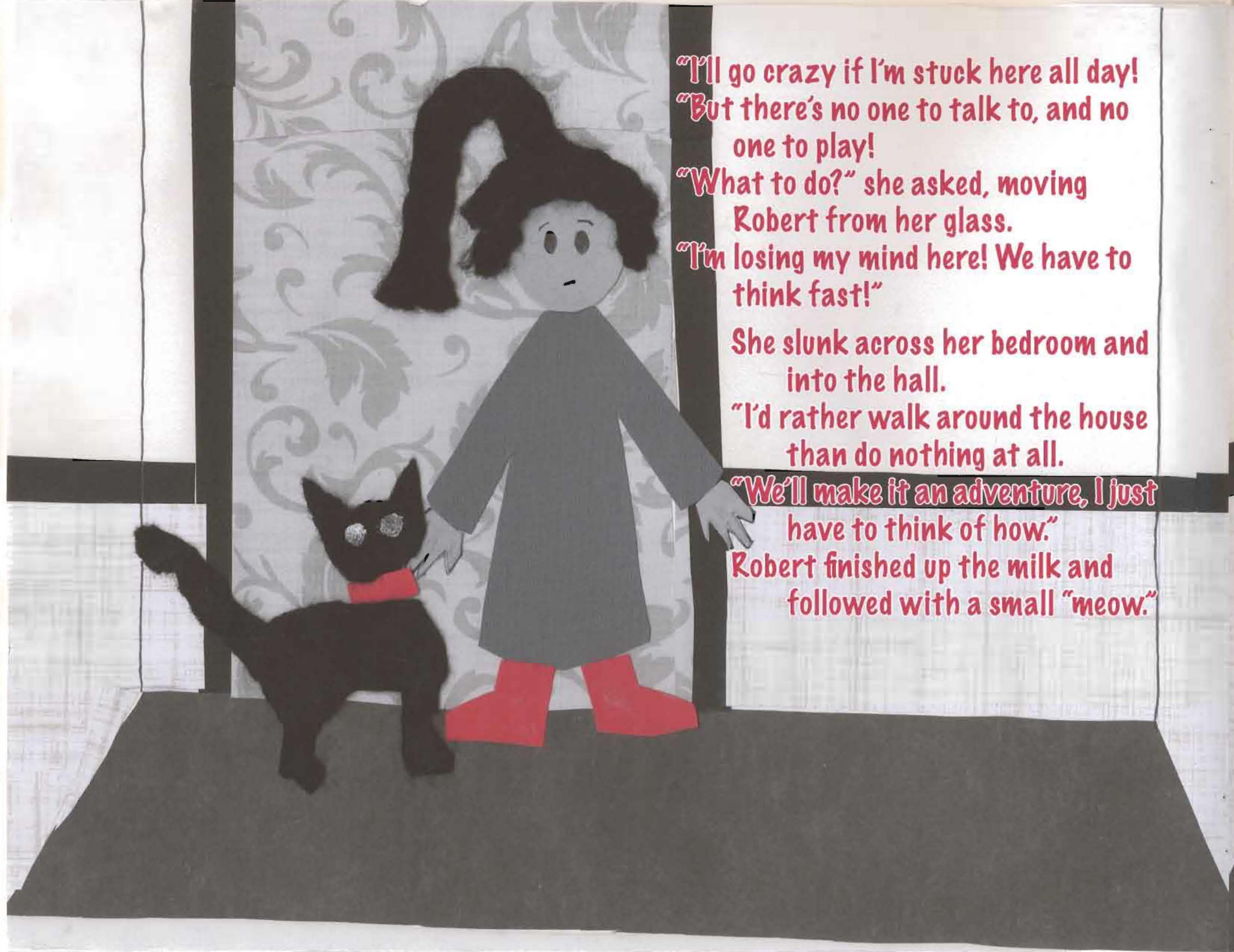
To Ryn Bailey, whose apparent wizardry with InDesign made this book possible.

And to my mother, who instilled in me a life-long passion for books and storytelling in its many forms.

The rain fell outside.
There was nothing to do.
Angela sat frowning.
Her cat, Robert, did too.

"We must think of something!"
She said, jumping up
And pacing, as Robert snuck
Milk from her cup.





"I'll go crazy if I'm stuck here all day!
"But there's no one to talk to, and no
one to play!

"What to do?" she asked, moving
Robert from her glass.

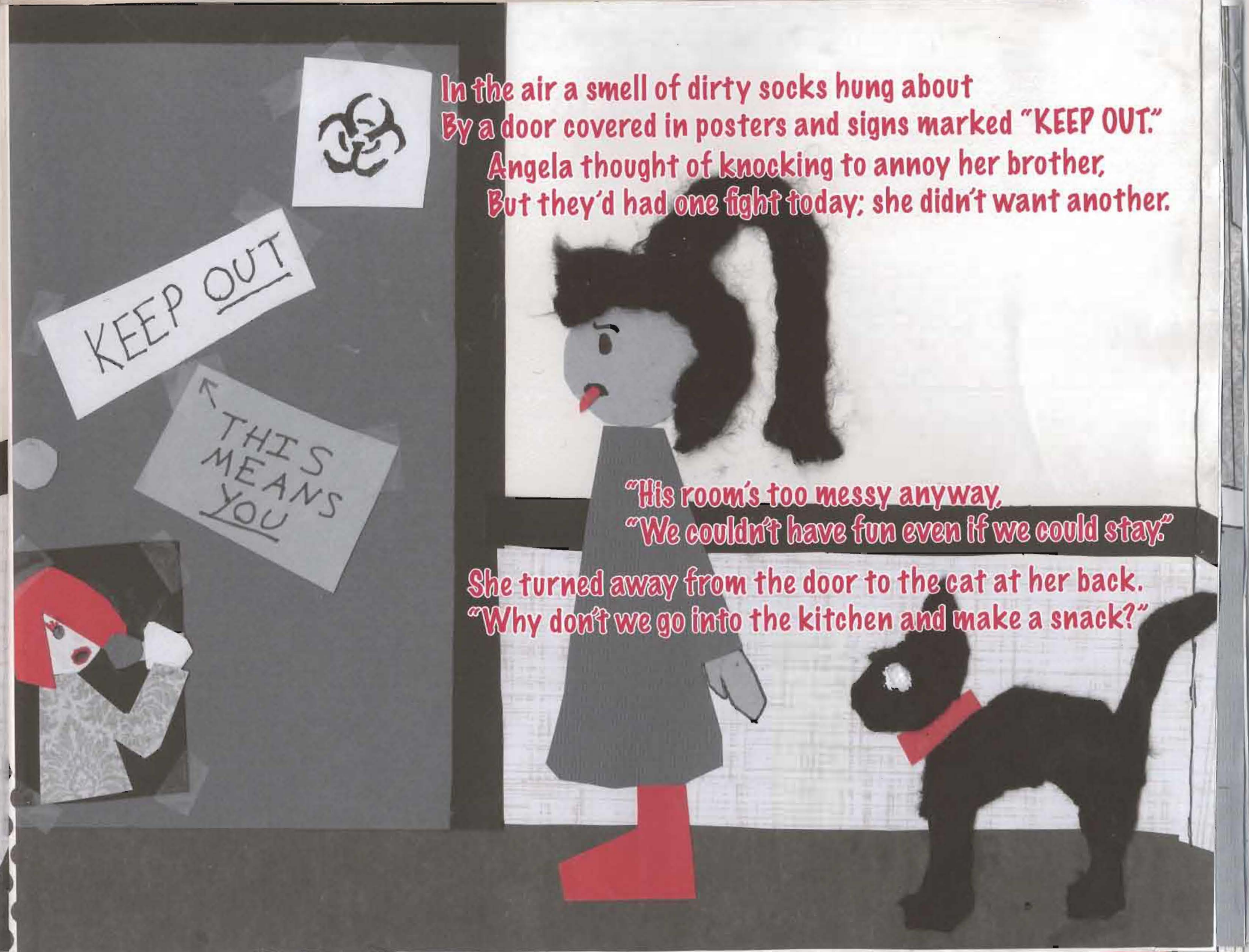
"I'm losing my mind here! We have to
think fast!"

She slunk across her bedroom and
into the hall.

"I'd rather walk around the house
than do nothing at all.

"We'll make it an adventure, I just
have to think of how."

Robert finished up the milk and
followed with a small "meow."



In the air a smell of dirty socks hung about
By a door covered in posters and signs marked "KEEP OUT."
Angela thought of knocking to annoy her brother,
But they'd had one fight today; she didn't want another.

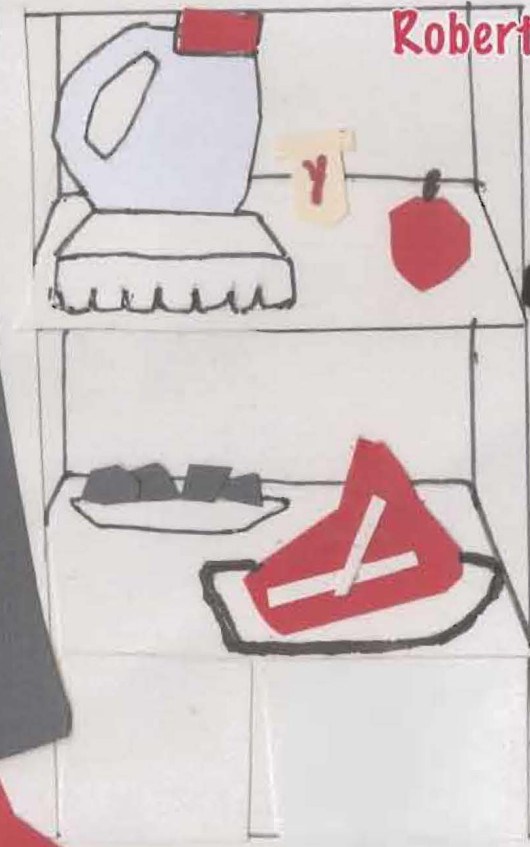
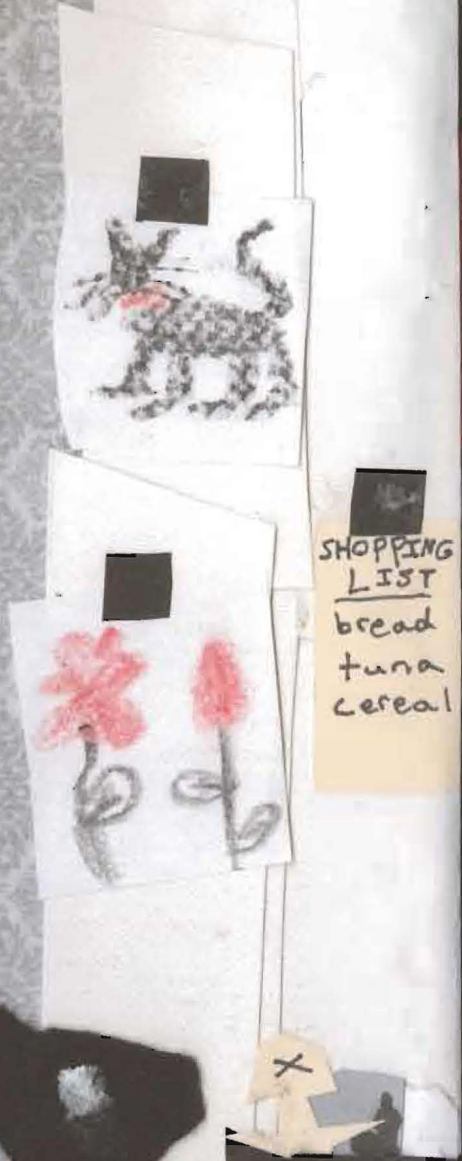
"His room's too messy anyway.
"We couldn't have fun even if we could stay."

She turned away from the door to the cat at her back.
"Why don't we go into the kitchen and make a snack?"

They went to the kitchen; Robert led the way.
Angela copied his four-legged sway.

She looked at the pantry,
wondering what to eat now.
Robert sniffed at the trash, with a
scratch and a, "meow."

The rumbly white fridge sat, her pictures on the door
A strange old stain stood out on the shiny floor.
In the rack were last night's dishes washed clean;
The light from above made them sparkle and gleam.



The cupboards were so high; the pantry was too.
Meat and eggs needed cooking, which she couldn't do.
The fruit and the yogurt were saved for the next meal;
The thought of the Brussels sprouts made her head reel.

"I'm not all that hungry," she said as she stood.
"And if we aren't eating, this room's not much good."
"Robert, get out of the garbage, stop being a cow!"
Robert dropped his fish bone with a sad "meow."

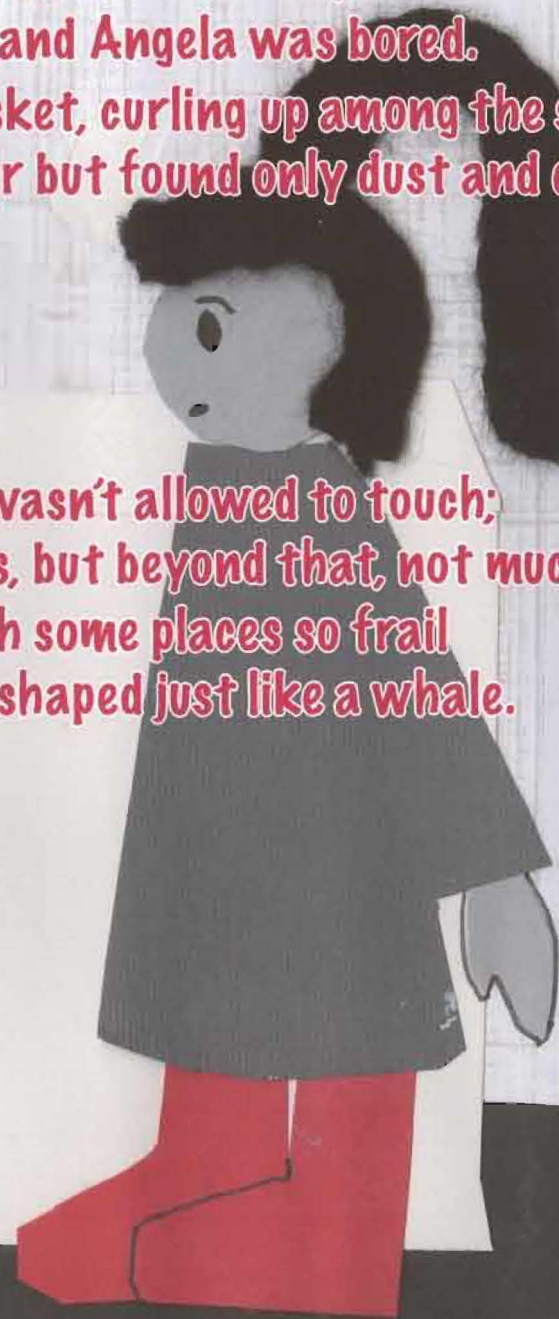


The washer spun clothes as the dryer shook and roared;
There wasn't much in the laundry room and Angela was bored.

Robert hopped into the basket, curling up among the shirts;
She looked behind the dryer but found only dust and dirt.

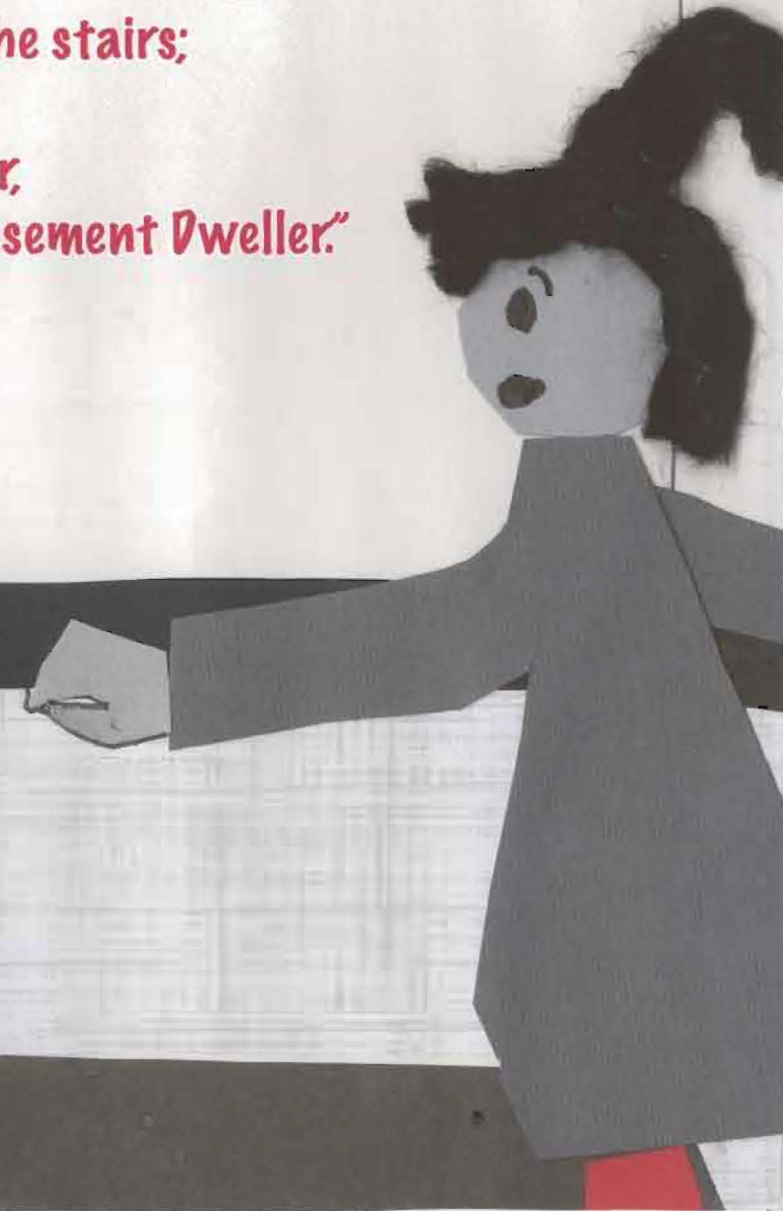
There were chemicals in the closet she wasn't allowed to touch;
She could ride a broom or play with rags, but beyond that, not much.


The wallpaper was peeling, with some places so frail
It was gone; one such spot was shaped just like a whale.



There was a single sock on the floor by an old box of soap flakes.
She decided to watch the washer until her stomach ached.
Sick, she told Robert that they had better leave now;
Robert, already out, answered with a, "meow."

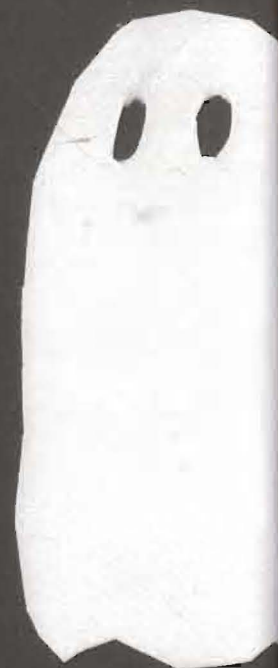
She spotted his tail as he slipped down the stairs;
Angela chased after, feeling the hairs
On her neck rise as she entered the cellar,
Praying she got to Robert before "The Basement Dweller."





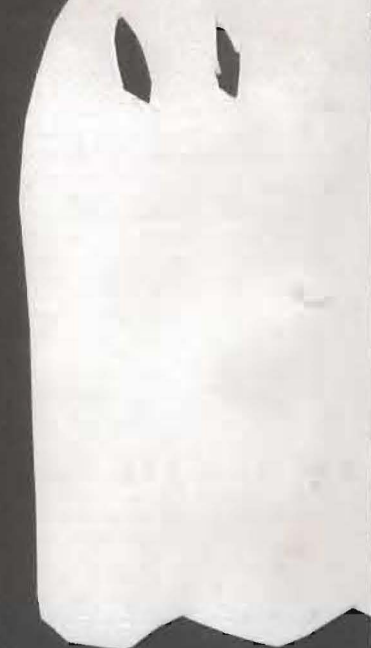
The walls around them were creaking;
The water pipes, leaking;
The darkness was creeping,
Angela almost shrieking!

She thought she saw something ghostly and white
Far off in the corner, away from the light.
The more she stared, the closer it seemed to grow.
Angela could hear its voice, groaning and low.



With a yelp she turned and rushed up the stairs,
Feet barely touching down, going by pairs.

A hiss from behind and an unearthly "Yow!"
Robert followed her up with a frightened meow.



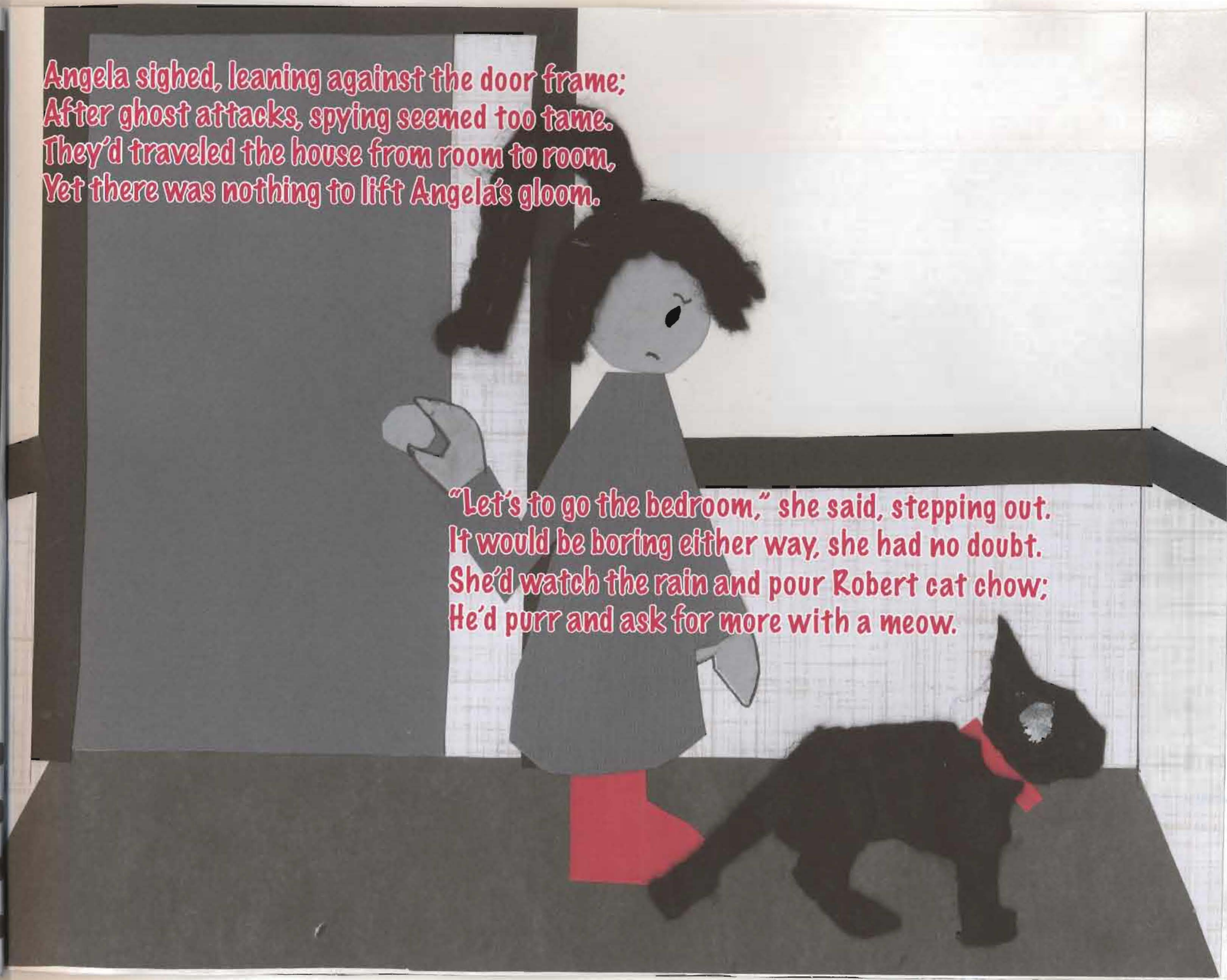
Angela ran to the bathroom to hide in the tub,
Stopping short as she watched her sister scrub
Her hair in the bubble bath with cream on her face,
Cucumber slices on her eyes, headphones in place.

A place filled with water wasn't much good for hiding;
At least, not a place that a cat was abiding.
The thing from the basement hadn't followed them.
Robert shrank from the water, fur standing on end.



Angela sighed, leaning against the door frame;
After ghost attacks, spying seemed too tame.
They'd traveled the house from room to room,
Yet there was nothing to lift Angela's gloom.

"Let's to go the bedroom," she said, stepping out.
It would be boring either way, she had no doubt.
She'd watch the rain and pour Robert cat chow;
He'd purr and ask for more with a meow.



She looked at her things as she stepped through the door,
Seeing the choices that she hadn't before.

There were books on the case, paper on the bed,
Crayons on the shelf from purple to red.

Angela sat in her chair, with paper and crayons at hand.
She sat and she sketched a washing machine storm with sand
And a boat, with a crew sailing over the seas.
She drew dirty sock monsters covered in fleas.



The crayons made a kitchen with a creepy stain;
Angela drew a ghost rattling its chains.

There were brooms and bubbles and headphones and fruit;
There were whales and spiders and red rubber boots.

Angela drew until the rain stopped, and then she drew more
Until bright pieces of paper covered her floor.
She drew all the day's adventures up until now
And she showed them to Robert, who smiled and meowed.



